

Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01

INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 /067 W

-----080547Z 066506 /22

R 080324Z MAR 77

FM AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2811

INFO AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMCONSUL AUCKLAND

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PGOV, NZ

SUBJECT: NEW ZEALAND'S NEXT GOVERNOR-GENERAL: SIR KEITH HOLYOAKE

REF: WELLINGTON 429

1. BEGIN UNCLASSIFIED. IN STATEMENT ISSUED MARCH 7 AS SHE PREPARED TO DEPART FOR AUSTRALIA, QUEEN ELIZABETH ANNOUNCED THE APPOINTMENT OF FORMER NEW ZEALAND PRIME MINISTER SIR KEITH HOLYOAKE TO SUCCEED SIR DENIS BLUNDELL AS NEW ZEALAND'S GOVERNOR-GENERAL. APPOINTMENT WILL BE FOR THREE YEARS AND SIR KEITH WILL TAKE UP NEW POSITION UPON BLUNDELL'S RETIREMENT SEPTEMBER 27, 1977.

2. SIR KEITH HAS FOR NEARLY FORTY YEARS BEEN POLITICALLY ACTIVE WITHIN NEW ZEALAND NATIONAL PARTY, INCLUDING SERVICE AS PRIME MINISTER AND MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS FOR OVER 12 YEARS. SINCE STEPPING DOWN AS PRIME MINISTER IN 1972, SIR KEITH HAS CONTINUED AS MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT AND, SINCE 1976, ONCE AGAIN AS MINISTER OF THE CROWN.

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3. APPOINTMENT OF SIR KEITH AS GOVERNOR-GENERAL IS BREAK IN TRADITION IN THAT IT IS FIRST TIME ACTIVE POLITICIAN HAS BEEN SELECTED TO POSITION. FURTHERMORE, PRIM MINISTER MULDOON ENGAGED IN NO PRETENSE WHATSOEVER THAT SELECTION WAS BI-PARTISAN. RESULT HAS BEEN IMMEDIATE CRITICISM FROM LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION ROWLING, OTHER MEMBERS OF LABOUR PARTY LEADERSHIP AND SOME ACADEMICS WHO EXPRESS DOUBT THAT SIR KEITH WILL BE ABLE TO

KEEP HIMSELF ABOVE POLITICS IN HIS NEW ROLE. ROWLING HAS SAID APPOINTMENT HAS FLAVOR OF "JOBS FOR THE BOYS" AND, WHILE ADMITTING THAT HIS REACTION WOULD HAVE BEEN NO DIFFERENT, BITTERLY DENOUNCED THE LACK OF BI-PARTISAN CONSULTATIONS BEFORE THE SELECTION. LABOUR PARTY DEPUTY LEADER TIZZARD HAS SAID HE WOULD SUPPORT MOVE TO SACK SIR KEITH IF LABOUR WON THE 1978 ELECTION.

4. WITH ANNOUNCEMENT, SIR KEITH RESIGNED HIS MINISTER OF STATE PORTFOLIO AND FROM EXECUTIVE COUNCIL. HE WILL RESIGN FROM HIS ELECTORATE LATER THIS WEEK, OPENING THE WAY FOR BY-ELECTION IN THE LATE APRIL/EARLY MAY.. PM MULDOON IS EXPECTED TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF OPENING TO ANNOUNCE MAJOR CABINET RESUFFLE, PERHAPS INCLUDING THE AGRICULTURE, DEFENSE AND TRANSPORTATION PORTFOLIOS. END UNCLASSIFIED.

5. COMMENT: BEGIN LOU: SIR KEITH'S APPOINTMENT WAS UNQUESTIONABLY A FUNCTION OF THE CLOSE, PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WHICH HE ENJOYS WITH MULDOON. IT IS THIS RELATIONSHIP, RATHER THAN FACT THAT SIR KEITH HAS BEEN IDENTIFIED WITH NATIONAL PARTY POLITICS FOR MORE THAN FORTY YEARS, WHICH GIVES RISE TO LABOUR'S CRITICISM. OF INTEREST IS FACT THAT APPOINTMENT IS FOR THREE YEARS, WHEREAS NORMAL TERM OF SERVICE FOR GOVERNOR-GENERALS HAS BEEN FIVE YEARS. THIS MAY HAVE BEEN IN DEFERENCE TO SIR KEITH'S AGE OF SEVENTY-THREE, BUT IT MAY ALSO INDICATE PRIME MINISTER IS BEING LITTLE MORE TENTATIVE ABOUT BREAK IN TRADITION THAN HE WOULD HAVE OTHERS BELIEVE. BE THAT AS IT MAY, SIR KEITH'S SELECTION IS A HIGH PERSONAL HONOR, HE IS A MAN OF DISTINGUISHED ABILITY AND MOST NEW ZEALANDERS ARE SURE TO WISH HIM WELL. FOR HIS PART, PRIME MINISTER MULDOON HAS DISMISSED CRITICISM FOR HIS HANDLING LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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OF SELECTION WITH TYPICAL DISDAIN. REACTING TO CRITICISM FROM ACADEMICS, MULDOON SAID "I HAVEN'T GOT MUCH TIME FOR POLITICAL SCIENTISTS. THEY ARE SORT OF LOW-GRADE STATISTICIANS." REACTING TO CRITICISM FROM A VERY VOCAL (AND UNWISE) MEMBER OF THE JUDICIARY MULDOON SAID, "WHEN WE APPOINT MAGISTRATES WE APPOINT PEOPLE WHO ARE KNOWLEDGEABLE IN THE LAW AND WHO WE THINK HAVE WISDOM AND DISCRETION. OCCASIONALLY WE MAKE AN ERROR." SELDEN

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PERSONNEL APPOINTMENTS
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Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
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Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
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Format: TEL
From: WELLINGTON
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
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Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t19770380/aaaacspy.tel
Line Count: 105
Litigation Code IDs:
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Litigation History:
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Office: ACTION EA
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 77 WELLINGTON 429
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 15-Nov-2004 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3170666
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: NEW ZEALAND'S NEXT GOVERNOR-GENERAL: SIR KEITH HOLYOAKE
TAGS: PGOV, NZ, (HOLYOAKE, KEITH)
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odhc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/837b5ebb-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009